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THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

MARCH, 1904

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION.¹

THE topic at once arouses the query: Has it any—any, that is to say, different from that possessed by any school as a place in which children and youth receive instruction? Well, let us see. I am a great believer in the sanctions and sanctities of history. What light does history throw on the significance of the School of Education?

It may be a cause of surprise to say that the School of Education is just coming of age—that it is now just twenty-one years old. You may, some of you, have thought of it as coming into existence as we took possession of these buildings; while others would think themselves certainly justified by the facts in saying that it is now in its third year of existence. But I date its origin from the year 1883. It was in that year, by a coincidence which I think also is an omen of good, that Colonel Parker came to the Cook County Normal School, and that the Chicago Manual Training School was opened under the direction of Mr. Belfield. It is pleasing to recall that Colonel Jacobson and Mr. Ham, who took so active a part in promoting the Chicago Manual Training School, also encouraged and assisted in every way in their power Colonel Parker in introducing manual-training work into the Cook County Normal School, where it was found from the very opening of Colonel Parker's work.

¹ A paper read before the School of Education Parents' Association, Chicago, January 28, 1904.

Since the School of Education in its present form is the direct outcome of the foundation and endowment of the Chicago Institute by the magnificent gift of Mrs. Emmons Blaine, and since this gift was the happy fruit of the inspiration proceeding from Colonel Parker's work at the Cook County Normal School (was intended, indeed, to consummate that work, to bring to fuller realization the possibilities it had made evident), no apology is needed for beginning my talk with this factor in the constitution of the significance of the School of Education.

The fact which this portion of our history — for I shall always claim that we are entitled to call it *our* history — puts before us is the meaning of the training of teachers in any educational project. Colonel Parker was sufficiently well known as a warrior and prophet in the cause of educational progress before he came to Chicago; but the storm center of educational reform was transferred from Quincy to Chicago in 1883, because Colonel Parker was enough of a prophet to foresee that the important thing, the controlling thing, in any educational movement is the personality and training of those who are to carry it on. It is to persons that everything in life at last comes back; and it is to teachers that everything in school life comes back. Moreover, Colonel Parker was enough of a warrior to see that the training of teachers is the strategic point in the educational campaign. Only from such a fortress can the battle economically and effectively be carried on. It goes without saying, however, that with the Normal School there was connected, as an organic part of the work of training teachers, an elementary school, and in idea, if not always in fact, a high school. Colonel Parker was the reformer that he was just because he saw that the cause of the child and the cause of the teacher are one. It is through the improvement of the standards, ideals, and working equipment of the teacher that the cause of education is to be advanced. But it is only in the enrichment, direction, and freedom of the life of children that this progress takes effect and has reality. The better training of teachers and the providing of a better school life, in which the children may find themselves, are Siamese twins of educational reform.

If we turn to history, we learn at least this: one fundamental and striking element in the significance of the School of Education is the desire and resolute purpose to promote the cause of education, not only here, but everywhere, through inspiring teachers with more vital and adequate conceptions of the nature of their work, and through furnishing them with the intellectual equipment necessary to make them effective and apt in carrying out such broadened and deepened ideals.

But, as I have already reminded you, this same year, the year 1883, was the year of the birth of another integral portion of our School of Education—the Chicago Manual Training School. This, too, had its origin in discontent with then prevailing methods and aims of education, particularly in high-school work. It was to some extent, I take it, like the movement which Colonel Parker represented, a protest against a one-sided education—an education which took account of the employment of the senses upon the symbols of things, but not sufficiently of the use of touch and sight and muscular sense upon things themselves; a protest against an ideal of education which identified instruction with training of powers of intellectual assimilation and accumulation at the expense of the training of the executive organs; a protest against an education which prepared for the more bookish and conventional professions of life at the expense of commerce, business, and those modes of productive creation which lie near the foundations of our social life. The Chicago Manual Training School, in other words, stood for a hitherto neglected factor and function in the educational field. It also, like the work of Colonel Parker in the Cook County Normal School, was a pioneer work. It was original and creative in its own department. We have a right to recall with pride, that in tracing the origins of two factors of our present school, we are also dealing with the origins of two movements of national significance—movements whose influence never was shut up within their own walls, or even within the city of Chicago, but which became models and inspirations of similar work all over the country.

So far at least we have no mean and insignificant ancestry.

But the School of Education is the School of Education *of the University of Chicago*, and that reminds us that there are other historical forces which have to be taken into account in reckoning up the significance of the School of Education. From this point of view, two other schools—the old University Elementary School, afterward called the Laboratory School, and the South Side Academy—demand recognition. Younger in years, they form the immediate ties which bind the School of Education to the university work as such.

The Laboratory School, as the name implies, was founded expressly for the purpose of scientific investigation and research into problems connected with the psychology and sociology of education. Its aim was to further the application of scientific conceptions and methods to the conduct of school work. The application of science to the physical departments of life is a fact so familiar that it hardly arouses much attention, even for a moment, excepting in its more unusual and extraordinary manifestations. But the conception that the methods of inquiry which prevail in science can be brought to bear in any useful way upon practical school problems is a very recent notion. Its recentness may, indeed, be judged from the fact that the Laboratory School was, like the two other factors which we have considered, a pioneer. With the exception of a kindergarten maintained for a short time under the auspices of a department of education at Leland Stanford University, the school had no predecessor. Taken as forming a factor, then, in the significance of the School of Education, the incorporation of the laboratory school marks the necessity of training teachers, not only by giving them inspiration, practical insight, and skill, but by giving them command of the most fundamental intellectual tools of the work which they are called to do. Over and above this, it stands for necessity of making the body of thought upon which education depends something more than, upon one side, a set of abstract and general theories, reinforced by a large amount of routine and empirical devices, upon the other. It commits the School of Education to the significant task of continuous research into the principles underlying educational practice, and to continual criticism of

methods that are in practical use, with a view to influencing intelligent thought and practice all over the country—a function which the Laboratory School had already fulfilled to a surprising extent, considering its short history and modest equipment.

Speaking in terms of relationship to the University, the incorporation of the Laboratory School signifies bringing to bear of the intellectual methods of which the modern university is the appropriate home and embodiment, upon all the questions of education, both elementary and secondary. To infuse lower education with the intellectual ideals which inspire university work, to show how the methods and operations of mind which are so fruitful for discovery and application in the highest flights of the mind can be made effective and operative from the very beginning of the school training of the child, is surely a fact of considerable significance. All of that significance is now embodied in the life of the School of Education.

The South Side Academy was founded in the year 1892 especially as a preparatory school for the University. This institution thus completes the circuit of connections with the University. To have represented here simply the training of teachers, simply the modern, more practical and applied, aspects of education, or even simply inquiry and application of scientific method, would still leave a gap. An educational institution which contains and represents all possibilities of the educational situation must surely include the important work of giving the information, discipline, and culture which are necessary for entering upon university work. At times, many of us become impatient with the seeming slow advance of educational ideals in our colleges, and revert more or less jocosely to the mediæval origin of such institutions; but in our sober and serious hours we all know that the college is a noble exponent and organ of all the things that are necessary to our higher life; and that any abating of its interest in that vague and somewhat intangible thing we call culture, would bring about a permanent loss in what is most worth while in our life. If the university is of such importance, then of equal importance are the institutions which devote themselves to preparation for it. "The

College Preparatory School" is a phrase sometimes used as a term of reproach. Sometimes college preparation does mean a narrowing of the kind of work done, a restriction upon preparation for full participation in all the ranges of social life, and then the term rightly carries some depreciatory coloring with it. But this is unnecessary, and, indeed, a perversion. As long as colleges exist, and adequately perform their social service, so long will college preparatory work also be an honor and not a reproach. If the cultural work of schools became too remote and abstract and dead, because of isolation from the more immediately practical, moving force of society, so also manual and commercial education easily becomes cramped, servile, and hard when apart from the illuminating and expanding elements of a cultural education.

This, then, is the answer of history to our question as to the significance of the School of Education. Put in terms of its origin, the School of Education signifies a bringing together of all factors of the educational problem. Upon the personal side it cherishes and maintains continuity with the past. While the great leader, Colonel Parker, has gone, a large part of the faculty trained by him is today a part of the School of Education. The original director of the Chicago Manual Training School, and a staff some parts of which have been connected with the same work almost from the beginning, participate in our present work. We have also those who have been connected from their inception with the Laboratory School and the South Side Academy. The roster would not be complete if I did not include one who, through connection with the department of education and the laboratory school, also brings the School of Education into the most intimate contact with the Chicago schools, thus enabling the School of Education to embody as a living part of its own work the fruits of a career of labor and honor in our public-school system. There is a piety of history as well as a natural piety, and I am proud to have the honor of reminding all present that the School of Education, instead of abruptly and violently severing it from the past, has at all points, so far as possible, gathered up into itself the wisdom and the experience that accrue with the

growing years. I am glad also to be able to say that, while the School of Education is an endowed, and in that sense a private, school, its whole past history commits it to the idea that as it grows out of, so it is to grow into public-school work, to be a help and encouragement in its growth.

But what does all this signify as to the future? The story indicates that the School of Education is not a *parvenu*. It has earned the right to its position through years of toil and struggle and conflict. Yet all this does not answer the question as to what it is to signify for the future of education.

I suppose all concerned with the School are met from time to time with the remark that it must be a work of very great difficulty to weld or fuse into one whole so many different elements. But this remark applies only to the mechanical side of the school situation. It is true, just a question of mechanics. But higher and deeper lie what may be termed the *organics* of the School. The fact is that here a number of living organisms, each doing well its own work, but each doing a limited work, have been brought into such living relation with one another as to enable each to receive and to get reinforcement. The problem is not one of mechanical adjustment, but of living multiplication and reproduction. Each element brings to the whole School of Education a factor without which there could not be an educational whole, and hence a factor which reacts upon every other so as to increase its efficiency and multiply its power.

It is especially significant to note that the School of Education now incarnates in itself all the elements which constitute the theoretical educational problem of the present. I mean we have right here in concrete, actual institutional form all the factors which any writer on education of the present day would lay down as involved in the problem of education. Thus we have the so-called practical and utilitarian element. This comes not merely from the Chicago Manual Training School, but from the stress laid from the first in the Cook County Normal School upon manual training, and the important place given in the Laboratory School to social occupations. Thus the motor, the executive side of the individual is appealed to. The School of Education

recognizes that an "all-around-education" is a mere name if it leaves out of account direct interest in seeing things and in doing things. The so-called practical and utilitarian factor is thus here not an isolated and independent thing, but the utilization of an otherwise wasted (and hence perverted) source of energy. But the School also stands for the most thoroughgoing recognition of the importance of scientific and cultural elements in education. Moreover, the School stands for these things, not merely within its own structure, but (through the training of teachers and the promulgation of sound educational theory) for educational progress and reform far beyond itself. I can imagine no greater catastrophe than that an institution which embodies within itself three distinct lines of pioneer work should become so institutionalized, or so content to rest upon its past, as not to recognize that there is still pioneer work to do, and that there always will be as long as the horizon of life recedes with every step we take. To have initiated these distinct and independent portions of an educational system represented here, was a great achievement. To stop here, not to recognize the growth that may come from their fusing into a vital whole, would be a calamity all the greater because of what has been achieved in the past.

I should not be surprised to know that some of the parents who hear me have been asking themselves, as I have been speaking, why these matters are put before them rather than before the teachers in the various schools which have come together. The answer is simple and direct. It is because the teachers coming from these various institutions, and elsewhere, and who now constitute the teaching staff of the School of Education, cannot do the work which they have to do without a co-operation which depends upon your sympathy. And by "sympathy" I do not mean either a mild and courteous toleration, or a willingness to excuse and palliate our various mistakes, but a sympathy which *understands* what it is that we are trying to do, and which co-operates and criticises because it understands and thus wants to help us better perform our own task. There is one kind of coeducation to which no one takes objections—one which is absolutely indispensable if the future of the School is to be as

significant as its own past exacts of it. This is coeducation of teachers, children, and parents by one another. I say *by* one another rather than *with* one another, for I think coeducation is not the passive reception of the same instruction side by side, but the active participation in the education of one by others. If the School is to move along steadily and as a whole within itself, it must be because it moves along with the body of parents who have intrusted their children to it, and because in turn the parents move along sympathetically with the endeavors and experiments and changes of the School itself.

Hence I have not hesitated to put before you the past of the School as indicating the problems which it has to meet in the future. I am sure that, if you will but bear in mind this past and consider the particular portion of the School in which you individually are most interested—elementary, high school, academic, or manual training—from the standpoint of the complex whole into which each such part enters and in which it must function, you will understand the work of that particular part much better, and be able to extend a more effective sympathy to us in the way both of encouragement or of criticism.

To make this very general talk somewhat more concrete, let me close by mentioning a particular point in which we shall especially and increasingly need your co-operation. In spite of all the advances that have been made throughout the country, there is still one unsolved problem in elementary and secondary education. That is the question of duly adapting to each other the practical and the utilitarian, the executive and the abstract, the tool and the book, the head and the hand. This is a problem of such vast scope that any systematic attempt to deal with it must have great influence upon the whole course of education everywhere. The School of Education, both in its elementary and secondary departments, is trying to make its contribution to this vexed question. Utility and culture, absorption and expression, theory and practice, are indispensable elements in any educational scheme. But, as a rule, they are pursued apart. As already indicated, the different schools which have entered into combination here make it necessary for

the School of Education to fuse hitherto separated factors. In this attempt we shall need your sympathetic intelligence. The fusion cannot be carried on without some modification, some transformation upon each side. It will be necessary to introduce more of the physical and manual element, more of expression in art, and of construction in the shop into the academic curriculum. On the other hand, without attacking or weakening the integrity of technical and technological preparation, it will doubtless be found necessary to infuse the more direct industrial and practical education with things derived from the larger outlook of history, science, and all we mean by general culture. Just because the isolation of these things in the past has told so heavily against the best interests of education, it is all the more necessary for an institution like the School of Education not to perpetuate this divorce, but to take earnest, constant, and progressive steps toward developing a balanced educational system in which each element shall have its proportionate place, at the same time enabling students to emphasize whatever side their own tastes and interests most definitely demand.

In the second place, I wish to enlist your sympathy with the social ideals and spirit which must prevail in the School of Education, if it is to be true to its own past. We trust, and shall continue to trust, to the social spirit as the ultimate and controlling motive in discipline. We believe, and we believe that our past experience warrants us in the belief, that a higher, more effective, more truly severe type of personal discipline and government may be secured through appeal to the social motives and interests of children and youth, than through an appeal to their anti-social ones. We have confidence in their responses to the normal demands of an orderly social life, rather than in their reactions against exactions which seem to them personal and arbitrary. The growth of this social spirit in an institution the size of this School must, indeed, be slow, but there is absolutely no reason why it should not be steady and irresistible—no reason, at least, if the parents understand the methods that are operating, and in all their conversations and intercourse with their own children, and with the teachers of the School, co-operate to this end.

There are, of course, very different methods of conducting a school, so far as what is ordinarily termed order and government are concerned. Doubtless part of the most important and influential result of the work of Colonel Parker was due to the constant warfare that he waged against appeal to purely extraneous and external motives in education—the use of bribes and threats as means of keeping students at their work and “in order.” No experienced and successful teacher has any doubt that right *instruction* is the primary means of maintaining discipline. Students who are interested in their work and in doing their work well are not students who are a menace to the well-being of the school. Wherever there are boys and girls there will be a certain amount of mischief and carelessness. Such things are easily enough taken care of as they show themselves. The only serious threat to a school’s “order” is found in a class of students who decline more or less deliberately to accept responsibility for their own conduct; and who consequently throw it back upon the teachers to see to it that they behave themselves properly. Under this system more or less constant espionage, a system of definite and detailed rules, appeal to purely competitive motives, reports, comparative standings, become inevitable parts of the school system.

The School of Education feels, however, that it is offering facilities which ought to appeal to a class of both parents and teachers who want a different kind of a school. There certainly is within the area which the School of Education can draw upon a sufficiently large number of parents and students who are interested in education for the sake of education, and in the school for the sake of what can be got from it worth having to justify an attempt to reduce to a minimum all of these mechanical and unworthy devices for keeping school order. It must be possible on some other basis to secure and maintain a wholesome social and moral spirit in the school. It cannot be too definitely stated that it is only to this class that the School of Education wants to appeal for material for its student body. It does not anticipate nor demand an unreasonable, much less a priggish, perfection from its students. But it does want and expect those who

come to it to be sufficiently aware of and interested in the educational privileges which are extended to them to take some initiative in developing that tone and atmosphere which will make unnecessary a servile dependence upon the ordinary machinery of petty rules, constant markings, reports, etc. The moral and social influence which the members of the student body exert upon each other is far more potent for good in the long run than any devices which teachers can set up and keep going; and the presence or absence of this influence must go back largely to home influences and surroundings.

The School of Education wishes particularly, then, the co-operation of parents in creating the healthy moral tone which will render quite unnecessary resort to lower and more unworthy motives for regulating conduct. We also ask the co-operation of the parents to help make the school in some sense an organizing center for the general social interests of the children, so far as these are carried on outside of their own homes. We do not wish the School to take the place of the home in furnishing children and youth with natural social recreation and modes of intercourse, but it is desirable that the interests, in the way of diversion and recreation, of children out of school be at least in general harmony with the pursuits of the children in school. Such matters as simplicity in dress, to the extent at least of fitness of dress for the school work which is to be done, and of lack of ostentation and display, are not to be despised. The cultivation of a democratic tone, an *esprit de corps* which attaches itself to the social life of the school as a whole, and not to that of some clique or set in it, requires no apology for mention. Indeed, an indefinite number of things might be specified. But time does not permit this, and so I must confine myself to the general statement that we hope that you will not look at either the Elementary or the High School as a place to which your children go just for the sake of receiving instruction. We hope you will remember that a school has a corporate life of its own; that, whether for good or for bad, it is itself a genuine social institution—a community. The influences which center in and radiate from this corporate social life are indefinitely more important with respect to the

moral development of your children than is simply class-room instruction in the abstract; and with reference to development of an all-around intellectual efficiency is at least a matter of equal importance.

Without, then, any further attempt to specify details of matters in which we shall need your co-operation, I may close with an exhortation to bear in mind the fundamental importance to yourselves and to your own children, as well as to the School, of the maintenance of the right sort of social aims and spirit throughout the School as a whole.

JOHN DEWEY.

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